

Decolonizing the Navajo Nation: The Lessons of the Naabaahii

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In Navajo, a warrior means someone who can get through the snowstorm when no one else can. In Navajo, a warrior is the one that doesn't get the flu when everyone else does—the only one walking around, making a fire for the sick, giving them medicine, feeding them food, making them strong to fight the flu. In Navajo, a warrior is the one who can use words so everyone knows they are part of the same family. In Navajo, a warrior says what is in the people's hearts. Talks about what the land means to them. Bring them together to fight for it.¹

In Diné (Navajo), the word for warrior is *naabaahii*. The *naabaahii* were men and women who fought an enemy and/or an illness/disease. These individuals worked bravely and tirelessly to protect their families and communities. When in battle, they used their mind, body, and spirit. Unfortunately, most of their knowledge have been lost, but some stories remain to draw upon.

Their stories can provide strategies to help decolonize the Navajo Nation. Numerous socio-economic problems persist in many Diné communities such as poverty, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, domestic violence, depression, and unemployment. These problems are constant and in many instances very debilitating. Diné peoples have narratives and experiences on how their ancestors, particularly the *naabaahii*, dealt with and overcame challenges. By examining the history of the twin warriors in their battles against the monsters and how the *naabaahii* fought their enemies, approaches can be developed and implemented in Diné communities to combat and defeat the many socio-economic challenges impacting many families.

The story of the twin warriors, Naayéé' Neezhání (Monster Slayer) and Tó Bájísh Chíní (Child Born of Water), to find their father, and the subsequent battles to rid

the Earth of the monsters terrorizing the peoples is a starting point. ‘Asdzǎǎ Nádleehe (Changing Woman), their mother, raised both of her sons without their father present. First Man, First Woman, and the rest of the Holy People also helped. First Man made them bows and arrows and took them on hunting trips. Haashch’éeshzhin (Fire God) took on the role of their uncle; he also was a counselor, teacher, and disciplinarian. The brothers learned to respect their elders, to be self-sufficient within limitations, to not ridicule others, and to avoid poverty. The extended family taught Nayée’ Neezhgání and Tó Bájish Chíní vital principles.

After a period of time, the twins asked their mother about their father. At first, Changing Woman would not tell them anything. She only said their father was dangerous and could kill them. This only made them more curious.

One day, on a hunting trip, the twins came upon a tiny hole in the ground with smoke drifting out. The boys heard a voice calling them to come in. The hole widened for them to crawl in. They climbed down a ladder to the bottom where they reached Na’ashjé’ii ‘Asdzǎǎ’s (Spider Woman) home. Na’ashjé’ii ‘Asdzǎǎ’s home was beautiful with webs and feathers from all bird types of every description and color. She asked the twins what they were doing, and one of them responded they were on a hunting trip. One of the boys also explained they wanted to find their father so they could ask him for his help to kill the monsters roaming the Earth. Spider Woman knew who their father was, and she could help them find him — their father was Jóhonaa’éei (Sun).

She fed the boys and showed them her great wealth of feathers. She fed the older brother corn meal with a small piece of turquoise in it and the younger brother the same meal with a small piece of white shell. She also gave each a hiinááh bits’os (magic eagle

feather) for protection. The turquoise and white shell were supposed to give the twins courage and make their hearts strong.

She told the twins what they would face on their journey to find their father. The trip would be dangerous and difficult, and she instructed them on what to do as they encountered each challenge. They learned the proper chants and prayers to keep them from harm.

The first challenge was Lok'aa' Adigishii (Reeds that Cut). In order for them to pass this challenge without getting killed, the boys needed to call the reed by the proper name and say the right prayer. The second challenge was Séit'áád (Moving Sand). The moving sand could cover a person if he or she stepped into it. The boys could cross the moving sand only with the proper prayer, chant, and by calling the moving sand by its correct name. The third challenge was Tsé'Ahéénínídił (Canyon which Closed in on a Traveler). The only way to escape death from the canyon was to use the magic eagle feathers. No prayer or proper chant could help them. The fourth challenge was Tsé Yot'ááhi'aai (Four Pillars of Rocks). The four pillars of rocks represented old age. She told the boys to pass on the sunny side of the rocks and not the shady side, which would cause them to die of old age. The fifth challenge was Nahodits'Q' (Wash that Swallowed). The twins needed to pray and call the wash by its proper name to avoid getting killed — to cross the wash they had to ask Wóóshiyishí (Measuring Worm). Once the wash reached the ocean, the boys would encounter Táłkáá' Dijádii (Water Skeeter). They would need to explain to Water Skeeter why they needed a ride, and also recite a few prayers before they began their ride across the ocean.

Upon reaching the Sun's home, the boys encountered four doormen who guarded the house; Tł'iish tsoh dooniniti'ii (Gigantic Snake), Shashtsoh (Huge Black Bear), Ii'ni'Bikə'jł (Big Thunder), and Niyoltsoh (Big Wind). Spider Woman taught the boys the proper chants and prayers to get past these guardians. Once they passed these guardians, they entered their father's home.

The boys overcame each obstacle. They reached their father's home and met his wife. The wife was startled to see the two boys. She questioned them to which the twins responded they wanted to see their father. The wife did not believe them. She became angry and tried to persuade the boys to leave, but they refused. The wife was afraid for their safety, but the boys did not fear for their lives. The Sun returned home and inquired about the two boys. At first, the Sun's wife did not acknowledge his question; but eventually, she chastised him about two boys coming to visit their father. The Sun searched the house for the two boys and found them. The boys explained their visit, but the Sun refused to believe them. He wanted to test them to see if they were really his sons.

The first test was to smoke tobacco. The Sun prepared a strong smoke designed to kill a human. The boys smoked the tobacco four times and felt fine. The prayers, chants, and magic eagle feather protected the twins from the dangerous smoke.

The second test was to take a sweat bath. The Sun's daughter helped the twins. She dug a pit in the back of the sweat lodge and covered it with sheets of white shell, darkness, evening twilight, sky blue, and dawn. She designed the pit to protect them from the enormous heat her father generates. The boys passed the test and the Sun thought they were indeed his sons. However, the father subjected the twins to two

additional tests, eating poisonous corn meal and big, sharp, multi-colored béésh doolghasii (flint knives). Each time the twins passed the test.

After the four tests, the Sun acknowledged the twins were his sons and his daughter bathed them. The daughter bathed the twins four times and each time in a different basket: white bead, turquoise, white shell, and black obsidian. The Sun, then molded and shaped the twins, and dressed them in beautiful adornment. The father showed the twins gifts they could take back with them on their journey home. While the twins acknowledged the gifts, they wanted the power to kill the monsters terrorizing the people. Several monsters such as Yé'iitsoh (Big Monster), Déélgééd (Horned Monster), Tsé Nináhálééh (Bird Monster), Tsédahódzítáíi (Monster that Kicked People off the Cliff), Biináá'yee'agháanii (Monster that Kills with His Eyes), and others roamed the world.

The twins wanted a weapon; it had the appearance of a bow and arrow hanging over the north door of the father's home. The Sun was hesitant to give them the weapon since some of the monsters were also his children; but eventually, he gave them the weapon—lightning. The twins also received body armor made of flint. The older brother was dressed in dark flint while the younger was dress in blue. The Sun also named the twins as the Diné peoples know them, Naayéé' Neezghání and Tó Bájish Chíní. The Sun gave Monster Slayer atsinilt'ish k'aa' (lightning that strikes crooked) and Child Born of Water hatsoo'algha k'aa' (lightning that flashes straight). The Sun told them how to kill Yé'iitsoh and requested a tail feather from Yé'iitsoh's headdress. The Sun gave one last instruction: the older brother was to kill the monsters while the younger brother watched

a special firebrand stick to monitor how the older brother was progressing. If the older brother was in trouble, the younger brother could help, but only then.

The twins started their search for the monsters. The first monster they determined to kill was Yé'itsoh. Yé'itsoh lived near a hot spring. The twins waited for him to return home. They saw each other. Yé'itsoh shot four arrows at the twins, but with the help of the magic eagle feathers they moved out of the path of the arrows. The twins shot back, first with a blinding flash of lightning, but Yé'itsoh remained standing and did not fall. Then, the twins threw the flint knives and when the last weapon hit the monster, he fell with a terrible noise shaking the Earth. Blood flowed out of the monster and the twins prevented the blood from coming back together; Yé'itsoh could have come back to life if the blood came together. The twins collected the tail feather and Yé'itsoh's skull for the Sun. They returned home to their mother and told her of their accomplishment. At first, Changing Woman did not believe her sons; eventually, she realized it.

Monster Slayer went out alone to search for the other monsters after a short period of rest. He came into contact with Tsédahódzítáíi (Monster that Kicked People Off the Cliff) at a place call Wild Horse Mesa, near present-day Mesa Verde, Colorado. The monster appeared in human form and he looked pleasant and harmless. He lay beside a narrow path along the cliff in the shade. Monster Slayer asked if he could pass and Tsédahódzítáíi said yes. Monster Slayer pretended to take a step, but quickly drew back when the monster tried to kick him off the cliff with his foot. Four times Monster Slayer attempted to take a step and four times the monster missed; then Monster Slayer threw his knife at Tsédahódzítáíi and killed him. The monster's hair was embedded

into the rock formation and Monster Slayer had to cut the hair so the body could fall off the cliff.

Next, Monster Slayer went after Déélgééd (Horned Monster). The Horned Monster had excellent eyesight, charged people, and ate people after it killed them. Monster Slayer tried to sneak up on Horned Monster, but he could not. He almost gave up when na'azisi (gopher) asked what he was doing. Monster Slayer told gopher he was trying to get as close as possible to Déélgééd to kill it. Gopher agreed to help him and began to dig a tunnel underneath the monster to where the heart was and began to chew off the hair covering the monster's heart. Then, Monster Slayer used his lightning arrow to strike the Horned Monster. He killed it. Monster Slayer returned home to tell his mother and brother he killed Déélgééd and Tsédahódzíítáii.

After resting for a while, Monster Slayer set off to kill Tsé Nináhálééh (Monster Bird). The giant killer bird and his family lived on top of Shiprock. Monster Slayer camouflaged himself by wearing hide skin and a part of the horn itself from Déélgééd; he also placed two sacred feathers under his arms. He walked around Shiprock until the Monster Bird picked him up. Tsé Nináhálééh dropped him into the nest. Tsé Nináhálééh's children almost ate him. The children cried, but Monster Slayer told them to be quiet and he would not hurt them. He asked the children when their father would return and the children responded their father would return when male rain fell. Later, male rain fell and Tsé Nináhálééh returned home.

Monster Slayer killed Tsé Nináhálééh with his lightning arrow. Later female rain fell and he killed the mother. Monster Slayer did not kill the two children, but told them to live good lives unlike their parents. The two bird children would later help Diné

peoples. The older bird child became atsá (eagle) and the younger na'ashjaa' (owl). The two children flew away, but Monster Slayer needed to find a way to get down from the nest atop Tsé Bit'a'í (Rock with Wings). Monster Slayer saw an old woman below. He yelled down to her to help him. She was afraid at first, but realized it was Monster Slayer. Na'ashjé'ii 'Asdzáá was the old woman. Monster Slayer gave her the feathers from the wings and the tail of the Monster Bird to thank her. Monster Slayer returned home and with his brother's help killed the remaining monsters.

The brothers returned home after killing all the monsters. They rested when they saw red smoke in the distance. They were curious as to what was causing the red smoke. They travelled to the smoke and found a hole in the ground. They looked inside and found several monsters resting. They quickly entered the place and attempted to kill them. Dichin Hastiih (hunger), Té'é'í Hastiih (poverty), Bił Hastiih (sleep), Yaa' Hastiih (lice man), and Sá (old age) were hiding. The twins were ready to kill them all when each monster pleaded for their existence. Dichin Hastiih argued, "without hunger people would eat one meal forever, but when people were hungry they would eat and taste new foods." The twins agreed to spare hunger's life. Té'é'í Hastiih argued, "without poverty, old things would not wear out and new things would not be made." The twins spared poverty's life. Bił Hastiih, Yaa' Hastiih, and Sá also argued for their existence and the twins spared their lives. All exist to this day.

After leaving the hole, the twins climbed the sacred mountains and searched in all four directions for other monsters, but they found none. They decided no other monsters existed. They returned home to Dził Ná'oodilii (Huerfano Mountain). Monster Slayer took off his armor and laid down his weapons, their father visited to take back the

weapons. The sons returned all the weapons except for the sunray arrow and the sunray as a means to travel.

After staying a while at home, the twins decided to go visit their father again.² The twins asked for all the gifts they saw on their first visit but their father said they asked for too much. Eventually, their father agreed to give all the gifts to his sons, but he wanted something in return. He wanted to destroy all those who lived in houses. After much consideration, the twins agreed to the offer. Jóhonaa'éei gave his sons obsidian, turquoise, abalone, white shell, horses, elk, antelopes, porcupines, deer, rabbits, white, blue, yellow, and black corn, striped and vari-colored corn, other plants, corn pollen, and small birds. The twins also received rainbow, zigzag lightning, sunray, mirages, male and female rain, dark and white mists. The twins returned home with these gifts.

Meanwhile, four days before their father came to destroy all those living in houses, First Man, First Woman, and all of the people gathered up male and female essences and pairs of all living things to protect them from Jóhonaa'éei's destruction. On the fourth day, the Sun flooded the Earth destroying much of it. After a period of time, the flood receded.

Afterwards, Monster Slayer was distressed and lacked energy. He began to experience psychological problems as a result of taking Yé'itsoh's skull.³ The people met to discuss how to help Monster Slayer. From this meeting, a new ceremony was created. The ceremony was called Monster Slayer Way. Building upon the Monster Slayer Way, the Enemy Way ceremony known as 'Anaa'ji was created. The Enemy Way continues to this day. All peoples who come into contact with an enemy or illness/disease must go through this ceremony to cleanse and protect themselves. The

ceremony is itself a battle against illness/disease and works to confuse illness/disease in order to beat it.

The ceremony must be done carefully and in the proper order. It is a four-day ceremony designed to “kill” the inner being of the enemy. When warriors engaged their enemies, they interacted with powerful energies and the ceremony worked to ensure the warrior is not harmed from those powerful energies. The warrior’s wife, girlfriend, or if the warrior is not married a female cousin on his father’s side of the family are an integral part of the ceremony to help the warrior. The woman represents the hózhóǵǵí, Blessing Way. The Blessing Way is the backbone to all Diné ceremonies. It represents all good energies. In the Enemy Way, the woman helps the warrior get rid of the enemy’s inner being in order to convey positive energy to his life.

While the Enemy Way helped warriors cleanse their mind, body, and spirit when they returned from battle, the ceremony was not the only part regarding warfare; it is only one segment of a cultural protocol. In Diné cultural protocol, *hataaʼíis* (healers) formed war parties. On average, thirty to two hundred men were needed. Usually, the *hataaʼii* who organized the party was in command.⁴ All able-bodied peoples were potential warriors. Women could be a part of the war party; however, they could not have sexual intercourse with any members of the party and could not take any scalps. Young boys were also trained for warfare and general hardships in life beginning at a very young age of six or seven years old. Young boys who were joining war parties for the first time had restrictions including eating certain foods, sleeping a certain way, and setting up camp. After the young boy had been in battle, these restrictions were removed.

If a person wanted to be a leader in battle, he or she learned from a *hataalii*. The warrior learned the songs and prayers to be used before battle and how to call the enemy by the proper name. These instructions were taught in enemy territory and never at home. It was never taught at home because it was believed to cause death in the family or among relatives; in other words it was similar to bringing on an epidemic, or an enemy attack.

In preparation for battle, Diné warriors had to abstain from sexual intercourse. They had to purify themselves in the *táchéii* (sweat house) for several days. They had to sing certain Monster Slayer songs and pray in a specific way. They had to make offerings to the *Diyin Dine'é* (Holy People) primarily via corn pollen (*tádííín*). Food rations were assembled. Bow and arrows, lances, clubs, shields, and other warfare equipment was made or repaired. Certain types of clothing including caps and leggings were put together. Horses were trained to be fast and learn certain maneuvers. Battle preparation was specific and organized; it was not taken lightly. No battle or conflict was attempted without preparation.

On the journey, cultural protocol dictated how the war parties travelled, where and how they slept, what songs they could sing, how they prayed, what foods they ate, who would lead the war parties, how they took care of their equipment, and when the battle would take place. Military conflicts usually took place in the morning hours. The leader of the war party called the enemy by the proper name, sang certain warfare songs, and made prayers. Diné warriors painted their bodies in red ochre, white clay, blue paint, or charcoal.⁵ They painted snakes, bear tracks, or human hands on their body.⁶ The snakes were believed to give a man power and make him feared as the snake was feared,

and the bear tracks to make him fierce and brave like the bear.⁷ The hands symbolized a five-fingered being, a human.

Fighting was not necessarily restricted although it was at the discretion of the individual; and not the leader, unless specific instructions were given to the group prior to going into conflict. Scalps were taken on occasion although women and a boy in his first battle could not take any. Usually, the individual only took one scalp. Homes and villages were almost never burned. Prisoners were taken on occasion and were never mistreated or tortured. Eventually, prisoners were recognized as Diné and no distinctions were made. If a warrior had died during the battle, the other warriors buried him or her. On their return home, cultural protocol again dictated how the war party would travel including what prayers to say, what songs to sing, and what routes to take to return home. Most of the songs, prayers, and other cultural protocol elements are no longer remembered in the twenty-first century. On their return home, ceremonies were done to acknowledge the success of the war party and to cleanse minds, bodies, and spirits.

Diné warriors were well trained and followed a system. This training and approach is key to any endeavor in life. The way a warrior trained and prepared to succeed in battle and conflict can be very helpful in the ways Diné peoples tackle all socio-economic challenges.

Decolonizing the Navajo Nation

The twin warriors' narratives and the history of the naabaahii provide lessons on how the Navajo Nation can decolonize and rebuild. One lesson from the twin warriors' narratives is service. The brothers wanted to get rid of all the monsters to help and protect the peoples. They did this without individual wants. They worked for the

peoples without envy, anger, or frustration. A second lesson is teamwork. The brothers with guidance from their father and others worked together to accomplish their goals. The brothers defeated the monsters with help from Spider Woman, gopher, and others. Without help from others, the brothers might not have been able to ensure the peoples' safety and protection. A third lesson is using the appropriate tools. The twins used the appropriate weaponry to defeat the monsters. They did not go beyond what was acquired nor asked for more. They only wanted to use what was available for them. A fourth lesson is setting goals. The twins had goals to fulfill and they needed many different peoples and ways to accomplish what they set out to do. They wanted to find their father and Spider Woman helped them. They wanted to destroy all the monsters and their father provided the weapons they needed to do so. A fifth lesson is compassion. Even when the twin brothers came across hungry, poverty, sleep, old age, and lice man, they listened to the benefits of each and they allowed them to live. A sixth lesson is belief. The twins believed in what they were doing and in their ability to defeat the monsters. A seventh lesson from the narratives is consistency. The twins protected the peoples and never refused to help them. They served.

The history of the naabaahii adds on to the lessons learned from the twin warriors. Preparation is pertinent. A strategy must be developed. Without knowledge and understanding of the terrain, enemy, etc., an effective means to success cannot be achieved. A spiritual approach is also learned from the naabaahii. The naabaahii prayed and sang to cleanse, protect, and balance what they did. Being in conflict or warfare is a powerful experience and people who participate need to be protected so they can continue to serve the people and ensure the community's wellness. The naabaahii were

adaptable; not all conflicts went according to plan so they had to deal with the situation at hand. They were disciplined and organized. To be successful in conflict or battling a disease, the naabaahii had to believe in their purpose and to develop ways to combat their enemies.

Taiaiake Alfred in *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* urges Indigenous communities to return to their ancestral philosophies and teachings. He draws upon the Iroquois Rotinohshonni Condolence ceremony to theorize ways Indigenous peoples can free themselves from settler colonialism. For instance, he symbolizes the ‘requickening’ portion of the ceremony to bringing something back to life; that something is recognizing the discomfort in Indigenous communities. He writes, “The question being addressed here is, what’s wrong in our community? What is the fundamental concern that we’re dealing with as a people?”⁸ He urges Indigenous peoples to reclaim Indigenous space (intellectual, political, and geographic), to develop an Indigenous consciousness, to make a commitment to transforming Indigenous community, to look out for dangers that might entice leaders, to communicate the ideals of life to the peoples, to keep in touch with ancestral teachings, and to ensure people are safe on the journey. He adds, “Adapt, change, go forward, but always make sure you’re listening to the traditional knowledge at the same time. Commit yourself to uphold the first principles and values. We have to refer to both the past and the future in our decision-making.”⁹

Alfred and his colleague Jeff Corntassel in “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism” believe Indigenous peoples have power in their relationship to land, relatives, language, and ceremonial life.¹⁰ They build on the

peoplehood model (community, language, and cultural practices) first put forth in 1962 by Edward H. Spicer in *Cycles of Conquest* and expanded on in a variety of ways by Robert K. Thomas in “The Tap-Roots of People,” Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle in *The Nations Within*, and Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis in “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies.” Alfred and Corntassel consider relationships to be the core of Indigenous identity.¹¹ The twin warriors and the naabaahii also demonstrate this thru their service and love for the peoples. Alfred and Corntassel contend the peoplehood model is flexible and dynamic in comparison to the static political and legal definition of Indigenous identity grounded in constitutional authority of the settler and colonial nation-state. They suggest a practical way of “being Indigenous.” They call for the individual regeneration of ancestral Indigenous ways of thought, and call for revitalizing an Indigenous way of life starting with the conscious intent to restore one’s indigeneity.¹² They also advocate for individual decolonized approaches.

It is time for each one of us to make the commitment to transcend colonialism as *people*, and for us to work together as *peoples* to become forces of Indigenous truth against the lie of colonialism. We do not need to wait for the colonizer to provide us with money or to validate our vision of a free future; we only need to start to use *our* Indigenous languages to frame our thoughts, the ethical framework of *our* philosophies to make decisions and to use *our* laws and institutions to govern ourselves.¹³

While most if not all Native Nations encouraged individuality in their communities, it would be reasonable to assume decolonizing and rebuilding Native Nations starts with

the person. A concern, though, is how the person changes his or her thought processes to similarly reflect how their ancestors thought prior to colonization. Alfred in *Wasáse* describes a new warrior as a free speaker, independent and creative thinker, and lives direct and radical action. The individual must have courage and to move forward regardless of consequences. Looking at what past warriors did and how they were successful on the battlefield is fundamental. Alfred writes:

They were *adaptable*, independent thinkers and flexible in responding to changes in plans and in situations. They had *skills*, were well-trained, and possessed the specific knowledge required to be effective in various types of battles and environments. They were *disciplined*, tough and stoic in the face of the extreme deprivations of war, including harsh mental and physical conditions.¹⁴

As an individual Diné, who is concerned about decolonizing and rebuilding the Navajo Nation, one can look at how a naabaahii prepared him or herself for battle against an enemy. The person purified and cleansed him or herself. He or she prayed and sang in a specific way before battle. He or she made or repaired equipment and when he or she went into battle he or she used their intelligence and cultural knowledge to defeat an enemy. In the twenty-first century, an individual Diné can pray and sing in a specific way to begin the social process of living a decolonized way of life. He or she can offer tádííin to pray. Decolonize foods such as beans, corn, deer, turkey, and chiles can become a part of his or her diet rather than white flour and sugar. The necessary equipment can be assembled, made, or repaired.

The primary equipment needed is a human being, who learns to decolonize his or her mind and follows certain aspects of ancestral knowledge and willingly utilizes

various tools such as the Fundamental Laws, the concept of hózhó, communication, and Diné history. The following will discuss each tool in detail and using the lessons from the twin warriors' narratives and the history of the naabaahii, individual Diné can decolonize and rebuild Diné communities.

The Fundamental Laws of the Diné were codified into Title One of the Navajo Nation Code in 2003. The Navajo Nation does not have a written constitution but the code represents the nation's laws and regulations instituted by the government. The laws are meant to enhance Diné leadership, sovereignty, and governance. The Navajo Nation Council and the Navajo court system use these laws to help them govern and analyze legal concerns. The laws consist of the following: traditional, customary, natural, and common.

Chapter one declares the foundation of the Fundamental Laws of the Diné, written in both Diné and English. The English version states:

We, the Diné, the people of the Great Covenant, are the image of our ancestor and we created in connection with all creation. The Holy People ordained, through songs and prayers, that Earth and universe embody thinking, Water and the sacred mountains embody planning, Air and variegated vegetation embody life, Fire, light, and offering sites of variegated sacred stones embody wisdom. These are the fundamental tenets established. Thinking is the foundation of planning. Life is the foundation of wisdom. Upon our creation, these were instituted within us and we embody them. Accordingly, we are identified by: Our Diné name, Our clan, Our language, Our life way, Our Shadow, Our footprints. Therefore, we were called the Holy Earth-Surface-People. From here growth began and the journey

proceeds. Different thinking, planning, life ways, languages, beliefs, and laws appear among us, but the fundamental laws placed by the Holy People remain unchanged. Hence, as we were created and with living soul, we remain Diné forever.¹⁵

This declaration is the rationale for the Fundamental Laws, but it can also serve the purpose of decolonization and rebuilding.

In Traditional law, Diné peoples have the right and freedom to choose leaders of their choice and for the leaders to carry out their duties and responsibilities in a moral and legal manner. The law calls for the peoples to respect and honor their elders and medicine peoples. It also calls for the Diné government and the peoples to respect the spiritual beliefs and practices of any person and to allow input and contribution of any religion. Diné peoples and the government are allowed to incorporate practices, principles, and values of other peoples in order to provide the physical and mental well-being of each person.

In Customary law, Diné peoples have the right and freedom to the language, culture, traditions, and histories of their ancestors and to teach it to their children.

In Natural law, air, water, light/fire, earth/pollen, the six sacred mountains and its attendants must be respected, honored, and protected. All living things on the Earth and in the universe have a right and freedom to exist and Diné peoples have a sacred obligation and duty to respect, preserve, and protect all.

In Common law, all written laws of the Navajo Nation must be developed in conjunction with Diné values and principles. Diné values and principles need to be

harnessed and utilized with other peoples' knowledge in exercising and exhibiting self-assurance, self-reliance and enjoying the beauty of happiness and harmony.¹⁶

The concept of hózhó is a principle Diné peoples strive in life. Various non-Diné scholars have defined hózhó in distinct ways, but primarily the English words beauty, peace, harmony, good, balance, and well-being are used to describe the principle. Hózhó is highly complex and cannot be explained in one word or sentence. Diné peoples work toward hózhó in their lifetime and the main objective is to achieve a delicate balance of positive and negative forces. Without an understanding of how to do this and the tools needed, a person will find it difficult to achieve and maintain happiness.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, forty percent of Diné families on the reservation live below the poverty level.¹⁷ Thousands of Diné peoples do not work or have a job. Capitalism is not effectively working for some Diné peoples. The Navajo Nation needs to be creative and establish an economic system where many, if not all, Diné peoples have a job or can find work that is meaningful and allows them to be productive. Alfred writes:

Appropriate economic development consists in taking advantage of opportunities to build self-sufficiency in order to preserve the essence of indigenous cultures and accomplish goals that emerge from the culture. This is quite different from tying a community to an exploitative economy promoting objectives that contravene traditional values.¹⁸

Enterprises will need to be developed to reflect the principle of hózhó and promote the well-being of the community and environment. In 2011, the Navajo Nation put together a revised energy policy designed to replace the 1980 policy. In the 2011 policy, it

addresses the nation's natural resources in the areas of assessment, exploration, severance, development, production, and distribution.¹⁹ The objective of the policy is to maximize revenue and create jobs for Diné peoples. Nowhere in the policy does it state anything about hózhó or protecting the environment. It will be a challenge to create conditions for self-sufficiency and economic prosperity for all Diné peoples where hózhó is the driving force. While it will be a challenge, it must be met, as Alfred writes:

We must always consider the broader political and social implications of the choices we make in our drive to accumulate wealth, whether individually or collectively, and to cooperate with other governments to ensure our communities' economic development. Without a commitment to the development of economic self-sufficiency in a framework of respect for traditional values, money can do nothing to promote decolonization and reassertion of our nationhood. The political and economic realities in which we live ensure that the unprincipled pursuit of money, outside a traditional framework, can only further entrench our colonization by embedding us deeper in colonial structures.²⁰

An economic system where profit is the objective and competition paramount, disregarding hózhó is not what is needed. A system designed to ensure happiness, wellness, and maintains a balanced approached needs to be thought out, planned, and instituted.

Communication within and outside Diné communities is another tool needed. Diné peoples can educate each other on the meaning and goals of decolonization and rebuilding. By educating each other on the meaning and how this can be achieved by practical means is imperative. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed states the oppressed can free themselves and the oppressors, too, through engaged dialogue. Diné peoples will need to stress to each other and to non-Diné peoples they seek decolonization, transformation of their communities, and the need to continue as distinct peoples.

Diné cultural knowledge is where Diné peoples need to be mindful of citing traditional notions of governance. Navajo courts utilize both cultural knowledge and contemporary ways in their legal analysis illustrating to other Native Nations how they can apply cultural knowledge in the judicial system. In retrospect, Diné peoples should be cautious when citing tradition in governance. For example, in recent times Diné leaders and peoples cited the creation narratives as a way to ridicule and shun a woman from serving as President of the Navajo Nation. Diné women have been leaders for generations. In the past, leaders had humility, valor, honesty, integrity, and generosity; gender nor gender discrimination had no bearing on leadership.

Past Diné leaders served the peoples first rather than the individual. One objective for past Diné leaders was community prosperity and wellness, not selfish gains. The individual had a heavy burden to carry; the individual had a lifelong commitment to the safety and welfare of the peoples. He or she carried certain knowledge and experience and never disrespected nor dishonored Diné peoples and a way of life. He or she always used cultural knowledge and understanding of traditions, rituals, and ceremonies to govern with much consideration given to families and future generations. Tom Holm, emeritus professor in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona, describes what historical Indigenous leadership meant:

A leader must have demonstrated his or her courage in the face of adversity, his or her absolute integrity in reporting either the movements of game or tribal enemies, his or her humbleness in the performance of religious duties, and his or her munificence in preserving accord within the community. And leadership in Native communities was demonstrative and often specific.²¹

History and leadership are helpful tools, but tradition needs to be a priority; particularly, in how it is used in government and by the people themselves. The overall goal of decolonizing and rebuilding the Navajo Nation is to ensure all Diné communities are prosperous, happy, and well not to serve individual wants.

Conclusion

We started our living again, we struggled to survive. And the only thing in the world we have is our own life and the land we want to keep to live on. Nowadays the men and the boys should be thinking about how they could survive like I survived. It must be in your thinking and in your life to be brave and to be safe.²²

The naabaahii were men and women who fought to protect the peoples, the land, and way of life. They worked bravely and without reservation to sustain their families and communities; their tools, ways, and knowledge helped them to survive and win battles. The lessons learned from the naabaahii and the twin warriors are needed.

By reviewing Diné history and cultural knowledge especially the creation narratives and how warriors prepared and fought for the peoples is useful in developing and implementing strategies. The naabaahii used their mind, body, and spirit to fight and defeat their enemies and illnesses/diseases; their strategies and intelligence helped them

to be successful. Numerous young Diné are graduating from colleges and professional schools where their intelligence and contemporary knowledge is needed.

Naayéé' Neezhání and Tó Bájish Chíní fought and defeated most of the monsters roaming the Earth in their time; their stories are fundamental to Diné peoples. The lessons of service, teamwork, using appropriate tools, setting goals, compassion, preparation, adaptability, discipline, belief, consistency, organization, and following a spiritual approach provide strategies to use and expand on.

Decolonization and rebuilding the Navajo Nation is attainable and starts with the individual. He or she can look at past warriors who sacrificed, protected, and worked for Diné peoples. He or she can use tools such as the Fundamental Laws, the concept of hózhó, communication, and a critical mind. Diné peoples are resilient and they have stories to rely on. Now is the time to get to work!

Notes

¹ Tiana Bighorse, ed. Noël Bennett, Bighorse the Warrior (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1990), xxiv.

² Some Navajo versions of the story do not mention of a second visit by the twins to see their father. The twin warriors narrative in this article is borrowed from Navajo History Volume I, edited by Ethelou Yazzie, and various individuals who discussed this story.

³ In Navajo culture, people are not supposed to discuss death and come into contact with funerary objects or items.

⁴ W. W. Hill, "Navaho Warfare," Yale University Publications in Anthropology 5 (1936): 6-7.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ Taiaiake Alfred, Peace Power Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xxi.

⁹ Ibid., xxii.

¹⁰ Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," Government and Opposition 40, no. 2 (2005): 597-614, quote on 605.

¹¹ Ibid., 609.

¹² Ibid., 614.

¹³ Ibid., 615.

¹⁴ Taiaiake Alfred, Wasáse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom

(Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2005), 84-85.

¹⁵ Fundamental Laws of the Diné

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Trib Choudhary, *Navajo Nation Data from U.S. Census 2000* (Window Rock, Ariz.:

Division of Economic Development, Navajo Nation, 2002).

¹⁸ Alfred, Peace, Power, Righteousness, 114-15.

¹⁹ Navajo Nation Energy Policy—Draft June 20, 2011

²⁰ Ibid., 119.

²¹ Tom Holm, “Decolonizing Native American Leaders: *Vine’s Call for Traditional*

Leadership” in Steve Pavlik and Daniel R. Wildcat, eds. Destroying Dogma: Vine

Deloria Jr. and His Influence on American Society (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 55.

²² Bighorse, Bighorse The Warrior, 2.